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ABSTRACT

The basic problematic issue confronting us in the study of black American writers and literature is that of determining whether we can identify the factors which conduce to the development of given social role conceptions, since the latter determines intellectual and artistic orientations to reality. In general, the problem is that of ascertaining the extent to which these roles are the consequences of common socialization or of concrete social relations. Once we have identified a writer's social role, we expect a convergence in stylistic orientation between his and that of other writers who possess similar role conceptions. Analysis proceeds by empirical inquiry into the variety of structural contexts within which writers are located from one historical period to another; and identification of the process by which the writer's social role is an outcome of given types of structural and historical locations. In general, the issue is that of the greater degree of instability of the literary artist's role, which is the consequence of its weak institutionalization in modern American society. By treating the issue of intellectual and social role this way, the sociology of knowledge achieves sharper differentiation of the occupationally problematic mandates in which these roles consist, and clear perception of the variety of references to which such roles are oriented. (Author/JM)

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF BLACK AMERICAN LITERATURE:

THE CHANGING SOCIAL ROLE OF BLACK WRITERS

Center for Social Organization Studies
University of Chicago
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THE CHANGING SOCIAL ROLE OF BLACK WRITERS

Background

To even the most casual observer of American society, the relations between black and white citizens must certainly constitute one of its most problematic aspects. The history of black people in American society has been in virtually every aspect unique. No other ethnic group in the U.S. underwent the experiences of enslavement and the subsequent reluctance of government to enforce the laws in protection of its citizenship rights. With the abolition of slavery, federal law for the first time departed from the tacit alliance it shared in the support of that institution. And this occurence marked the beginning of an as yet unresolved conflict between legal and cultural prescriptions regarding the matter of race. It is this situation that makes up the background of the historical drama of race-relations in the present century.

The Ideological Response

Among black American intellectuals and community leaders there have been two basic patterns of ideological orientation to the plight of black people in the United States: separation and assimilation. Between these two tendencies there has existed a persistent tension, often reflected in the different social class locations of competing advocates. Understanding such ideological orientations is essential to apprehending the assumptions

or premises that characterize a historical period. But even more importantly, ideological world-views serve as a basis for insight into the self-conceptions, or social roles, assumed by those intellectuals who endorse them. Specifically the major race relations ideologies manifested by black intellectuals have been

(1) Booker T. Washington's self-help emphasis on industrial education for the black masses, which was the dominant race relations ideology up until his death in 1915. Though Washington was the most influential black leader among white American philanthropists, his position did not go unchallenged.

(2) W.E.B. DuBois, the Harvard educated historian, advocated an integrationist approach to be achieved through the education of a black leadership class, the talented ten per cent. Indeed the Washington-DuBois controversy constituted the most significant controversy in pre-World War I black American intellectual life. It seems a general axiom in intellectual history that all major transformations in intellectual outlook are preceded by periods of conflict between competing schools of thought.

The approach of the N.A.A.C.P. and the Urban League were to become the institutional embodiments of the integrationist race relations ideology. Advocated by intellectuals who were products of the middle class strata and integrated universities, this approach of education and assimilation has been by far the most persistent

if not always the most popular. Reasons for its long tenure are basically institutional. Since the death of Booker T. Washington the integrationist-assimilationist movement has received the greatest share of financial support and legitimation from white philanthropist and government leaders. Even so, this ideology was not to go unchallenged.

(3) Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican, came to the U.S. in 1916 to meet Booker T. Washington with the ostensive purpose of soliciting support in setting up a Tuskegee type institution in Jamaica. Instead, Garvey developed a separatist philosophy and organization based in Harlem. This movement presented the "integrationist" advocates perhaps their greatest challenge. Several factors facilitated this turn of events. One, Washington died before Garvey met him; two, Woodrow Wilson's emphasis on self-determination of subject peoples. Three, with the generally deteriorating plight of black agricultural workers in the South and with the need for increased industrial manpower during World War I, large numbers of black people migrated North. This precipatated race riots and an overall increase in tensions between white and blacks. Given all these difficulties of urban adaptation, a mood of discontent began to spread among the black masses. Four, Garvey's own lack of familiarity with industrial cities, especially his misapprehension of how to build industrial enterprises. With these facts and, also, the failure of existing intellectual and

community leaders to articulate the discontent in ethnic terms--Garvey's separatist appeal touched off a flame of enthusiasm. This back-to-Africa ideology was to enjoy its greatest vogue in the early part of the 1920's. Why it proved more effective among the black masses than the integrationist's ideology has to do precisely with its strongly expressed anti-white hostility and its emphasis upon 'ethnic pride'. Although the integrationist ethic would remain dominant, thereafter the ethnic nationalism represented by Garvey was to provide a persistent counterpoint. The hostile reception that met the Garvey movement from black leaders, businessmen and the government has to be understood in terms of the institutional supports granted the 'integrationist' approach. It was so to speak the official race relations ethic.

Indeed under conditions of perpetual poverty and low rates of social mobility, there is a sense in which this ideology is indemic to the black urban ghetto. With the traditional ties to the church weakened by the transition from the rural south, the persisting effects of economic insecurity and racial discrimination, integrationism is little more than an irrelevant ideal. Garveyism initiated an unprecedented emphasis on ethnic pride. For the first time the issue of community, not as a transit stage to integration but as a permanent entity, became a possibility. In a situation previously defined as being appropriate only to industrial education of the masses or classical education of the elite, Garvey initiated bold redefinitions. For

his was the first approach which denied the implicit assumption that integration was a desireable goal. The fact that he was prosecuted under a questionable charge and courtroom proceedings would seem to further attest to the institutional attribution of odium to his movement. But ever since the 1920's, the notion of ethnic nationalism has proved a persistent and troublesome irritant to integrationists.

(4) The last ideological response to race relations, also a troublesome irritant to the integrationists organizations but no friend of ethnic nationalism, was Marxism and the communist party. Never did Marxism have a greater influence among black American intellectuals than during the depression decade of the 1930's. But it never succeeded in the realization of its grass roots ambitions among the black masses as had the Garvey movement. Indeed most of the black intellectuals who were attracted to Marxism were none other than prominent integrationists of the 1920's decade, who were alienated from both American capitalism and the ethnic culture of the poor blacks who inhabited the large city slums. They were generally better educated and moved in more interracial social circles than did the average black American slum dweller. Ironically both Marxism and the integrationist approaches are parallel in their de-emphasis on ethnicity and in the hostility they expressed toward the Garvey movement.

While they do not share the same suppositions about social order, this common distaste for 'ethnic nationalism' may account for the fact that

many disillusioned integrationist black intellectuals turned to Marxism rather than ethnic nationalism. Following the Second World War the response of many disillusioned integrationists would be expatriation to Europe rather than Marxism. Though European expatriation has been of no significance in terms of the black masses, it has had important consequences for the expatriated black American intellectual's conception of his social role in relations to the American social scene.

Interestingly there is no overlap between the two categories. Marxist of the thirties did not tend to expatriate; disillusioned integrationists of the post-war forties did.

We summarize the above ideological orientations in the following typology.

Race Relations

Ideology

Economic Position	Integration	Separation	Period of Dominance
Capitalistic	N. A. A. C. P. I	Tuskegee II	I-Pervasive 20's,40's,50's II-Pre-1915
Socialistic	Communist Party III	Garveyism? UNIA IV	III-1930's IV-Early1920's

The above is intended only as a sketch of the race relations ideologies and organizations up to the mid-fifties. It is not meant to be exhaustive, for we have excluded the existentialist ideology of the 1950's,

the expatriation ideology, the new civil rights activism of the late 50's and early 60's and militant separatists ideology of the late 60's. Obviously no study of stylistic orientations in black literature can exclude the later developments. However, our purpose here was not so much to be definitive, as it was to provide a background of the ideological currents which have influenced the black writer's conception of his social role. More on this later; now we will place the preceding ideological orientations in a sociological perspective.

II

RACE RELATIONS IDEOLOGIES IN SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

What we find when we examine the above ideological responses sociologically is that they correspond to definite structural conditions. Ethnic nationalism appears to have had its widest appeal among the lower strata, whereas the integrationist ideology attracted the support of the black middle classes. Whether the integrationist's position accented merely economic opportunities or general social integration seems to have been dependent upon the social background and occupational base of the black middle class. The black bourgoise strata, whose socialization and educational experiences were primarily segregated and whose occupations are located in the black community (teaching, law, medicine, etc.), manifested a concern for greater economic opportunity. Whereas their opposites, the black integrationist emphasized not only greater economic opportunity but also social integration. The socialization and educational experiences of the group

tend to be interracial. It is this version of the integrationist ideology which received the greatest support and legitimation from whites. As opportunities for professional employment outside the black community increases, along with increasing enrollment of black students in interracial universities--the likelihood is strong that the black bourgoise strata will be replaced by an integrationist oriented black middle class group. Noteworthy, the assumption upon which this approach is based suggests that the problems confronted by black Americans could be alleviated by a combination of education, good will and legislative prescription of racial discrimination. The fact that most such legislative prescriptions lacked adequate enforcement apparatus played no small part in the increasing cynicism toward the motives of white leaders.

The structural basis of ethnic nationalism is the disproportion between the economic impoverishment of the black masses as contrasted to the increasing prosperity of the society at large. Whereas the period of Marxist influence was one in which the impoverishment of the black masses corresponded to that of many whites--hence, the basis for the articulation of an alliance. We will not here enter into the detail of the process. Our aim is only to suggest the interrelatedness of structural and ideological factors.

Social integration of black Americans into the wider society can only proceed by the disintegration of the black group as an ethnic entity in American society. We should therefore expect to find little or no sense of ethnic identification among black intellectuals during those periods

when integrationist ideology is dominant--as was the case with the Marxian advocacy of worker's integration during the depression of the 1930's and the civil rights advocacy of integration in the 1940's and 1950's.

The model we are proposing here is that of value conflicts and competing status systems. (See Gusfield, 1966) Under conditions of integrationist ideology, there is an implicit symbolic degradation of ethnic culture. For the above integration, rather assimilation, accents the values of the dominant culture, such as its patterns of education, family life, work, leisure time habits, etc. Such traits of ethnic culture as dialect, food habits, modes of dress, dance and behavior are symbolically degraded. This matter has received extensive discussion in reference to intellectuals in developing countries.

As a sociological phenomenon, it is not difficult to understand how this process proceeds by means of social mobility. Given relatively low rates of upward mobility, however, especially generational succession in urban slums--the result of an integrationist outlook is likely to be a widespread sense of low self esteem and dislocation.

Basic Problem: Social Role of Black American Writers

As more and more systematic study of intellectual and artistic orientations is conducted, the sociology of knowledge promises to open a new frontier of inquiry.

In his book, Ideology and Utopia, Karl Mannheim refers to the intelligentsia as a relatively classless, socially unattached intelligentsia (frewebende intelligenz). (See Mannheim, 1936) He goes on to suggest that

their backgrounds are too differentiated to permit their identification as a class. "Consequently it cannot be maintained that they are homogeneously determined. There is, however, one unifying sociological bond between all groups of intellectuals, namely, education, which binds them together in a striking way."

However, Mannheim seems somewhat uncertain about this as we note in another context he writes:

> Intellectual and cultural history is surely shaped, among other things, by social relations, in which men get confronted with each other, by groups within which they find mutual stimulus, where concrete struggles produce entelechies and thereby also influence to a large extent shapes, art, religion and so on. (Emphasis added)

What Mannheim refers to as an entelechy we designated as a social role. The basic problematic issue confronting us in the study of black American writers and literature is that of determining whether we can identify the factors which conduce to the development of given social role conceptions. For it is the latter which determines intellectual and artistic orientations to reality. In general, the problem is that of ascertaining the extent to which these roles are the consequences of common socialization (i.e., education, social class, etc.) or of concrete social relations.

Formulation of the problem in this way avoids two prevalent pitfalls. One is that exemplified in Mannheim's work, and that of intellectual historians and critics. The delineation of primary factors is so vague as to obscure the relationship between them. Thus, for example, the term "shapes" as a designation of relationship between factos is plainly inadequate.

Two, assumption of the point to be proved. The intellectual and artistic roles are treated as products of social class, national character, and the like. Marx's formulation is a familiar case in point (see Marx, 1904).

In a recent paper we attempted to provide a scheme for wider range of differentiation between the social organization contexts of intellectual and artistic roles. Our objectives were to differentiate between the duties incumbent upon such locations and, also, to distinguish between those social structures that conduce to integrational orientation and those that do not (see "Institutionalization of Intellectual Process," Center for Social Organization Studies, #154).

Returning now to the problem of freiwebende intelligenz, hypothesis is that non-institutionally affiliated intellectual and artistic roles vary widely in the degree to which they are structurally embedded versus free floating. Such roles are far less likely to be removed from structural contexts than Mannheim assumed. Our objective is to delineate the structural context of the writer's location and its orientation to reality as the basis for determination of his social role conception. Once we have identified a writer's social role, we therefore expect a convergence in stylistic orientation between his and other writers who possess similar social role conceptions.

Successful literary works are often arrested forms, and there are few better examples of this than Richard Wright's Native Son. It came to serve as a model for aspiring young black authors of the 1940's. Undertaking

the imperatives of form and emphasis dictated by the model, be it a successful novel, poem, or play, constitutes nothing less than the assumption of a role definition of one's self as a writer. Just as stylistic orientation corresponds to a role conception, it is also the writer's preferred mode of perception. What Thornstein Veblen so aptly termed--occupational psychosis. The type construct of the Native Son model dictated a literature of naturalistic protest.

As noted, our aim will be to distinguish between socialization determinants of the writer's social role versus those of social relations. Analysis here then proceeds not by assumption of the problematic issue, but rather by empirical inquiry into the variety of structural contexts within which writers are located from one historial period to another; and identification of the process by which the writer's social role is an outcome of given type structural and historical locations.

In general the issue is that of the greater degree of instability of the literary artist's role, which is the consequence of its weak institutionalization in modern American society. By treating the issue of intellectual and social role this way the sociology of knowledge achieves sharper differentiation of the occupationally problematic mandates in which these roles consists and clear perception of the variety of references to which such roles are oriented. This approach makes a departure from intellectual history which tends to treat ideas as though their history were independent of the lives and preoccupations of men in their social existence.

When compared to socially organized occupations such as the profes-

sions and wage labor, the problematic nature of artistic and non-academic intellectual roles becomes quite clear. It is this role context that Everett Hughes refers to as an occupation's mandates, which "claim to define not merely for themselves, but for others as well--proper conduct with respect to the matters concerned in their work." (See Hughes, 1952) Lacking an institutional base, the mandate of intellectual and artistic work becomes its most problematic element.

It is the objective of our analysis of black American literature to explain how such mandates come into being as a consequence of changes in the social background and location, explanation of how the black American writer's ideological orientation is articulated in terms of the above and what, overall, has been the consequences of these changes in the conditions under which the black writer exist in American society, namely their social relations, for the pattern of development of black American literature. Ordinarily the mandate of occupations tend to be unproblematic. For orientations to the immediate sphere of reality is regulated by the control structure of the institutional setting such as wage work or socialization such as is the case of the professions. Study of university affiliated intellectual spheres such as the sciences indicates the functiong of both control and reward structures as the basis for structural consensus and integrated continuity.

In studying the development of non-institutionally affiliated intellectual and artistic roles, it is important to take note of both the system of exchanges and the semantic references that sustain them--in a large

historical perspective. As Kenneth Burke so aptly states it:

> Of course, if the conditions of living have undergone radical changes since the time when the scheme of duties and virtue crystalized, the serviceability of the orientation may be impaired. Our duties may not serve their purposes so well as they once did. Thus we may no longer be sure of our duties, with the result that we may cease to be sure of our motives. We may then be open to a new theory of motivations than we should be at a time when the idea of duty was more accurately adjusted to the situation (see Burke, 1954).

The transformation of occupational structure in western society from a feudal to a contractual set of relations had far reaching consequences for the roles of artists and intellectuals. In one sense they were freer than they had been, but also their status was more insecure. Their place and condition of life were subject to wide ranging fluctuation.

It is true, as Hughes points out, that "modern industrial and urban societies and economies, no matter what the political systems under which they operate, are characterized by a wholesale mobilization of people away from traditional and familial activities into more formally organized work."

But actually the case was quite the opposite for literary artists. ". . . . There are some indications that, as an indirect result of their role in removing literature from the control of patronage and bringing it under the control of the laws of the market place, they (the booksellers) both assisted the development of one of the characteristic technical innovations of the new form--its copious particularity and explanation--and made possible the remarkable independence of Defoe and Richardson from the classical tradition which was indispensable condition for their literary achievement." (See Watt, 1967) This appears to have been the consequence for classical

tradition generally with the modernization of the literary artist's role. With the exception of the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc countries, no attempt has been undertaken to professionalize the writer's role and, of course, his orientation.

Given changes in historical conditions and corresponding changes in orientation, we have the phenomenon of "in-datedness" versus "out-datedness" or orientation. Thus we find between authors the simultaneous existence of incompatible orientations--which are the products of different socialization and social relational experiences. This, of course, can be referred back to the weak institutionalization of literary roles--and the wide range of freedom of reference permitted them than, say, the roles of physicists and economists. "In-datedness" of outlook would seem to correspond to an orientation's development in response to new historical and social trends--whereas "out-datedness" simply has refernece to older and extant social and historical conditions. Thus the romanticism of the 18th century were "in-dated" in the sense it was a product of changing conditions of life--whereas, classicism was "out-dated" in the sense that the conditions of life that conduced to its maintainance, namely narrow based educational and social relational experiences, ceased to exist with the demise of the aristocratic stratum. There are countless other examples of "in-datedness" and "out-datedness" of outlook, for non-institutionally bounded intellectual and artistic orientations appear to have limited tenures. This would appear to be a consequence of the fact that their role conceptions are much more directly governed by the fluctuating fortunes of historical

conditions--especially in so far as the latter affects the writer's social location, livelihood and sense of self-esteem. We hear such references frequently today when certain intellectuals are designated as being "oriented to the cold war" and others to "post cold war ideology." The implication of "lag" is definitely there. In our analysis of black American literature, we will be particularly concerned to identify these various strata of historical reference in the orientations expressed.

Changing Social Contexts, Social Roles and Styles Of Black American Writers: A Preliminary Outline

The relationship between the dominant ideological orientation of the writer's social context and writer's conception of his role is of crucial significance. Especially important is a differentiation of the system of exchanges between the black literary artist and his social context--educative, financial, emotionally supportive, etc. A mistake commonly made is that of assuming all writers to have a basically similar social context, relationship to it and conception of their responsibility as an artist. In general, this context may vary from that of an ethnic group, geographical region, nation state, social class, circle, etc. Understanding the nature of this social context and the writer's reference to it is very closely related to the problems of provincialism in literature. The literary style, or role, designated as modernism is distinguished by the fact that it has a rather narrow social context, namely that of literary circles, and its conception of its responsibility tends not to extend

beyond an allegiance to "art for art's sake." With the exception of a few individual black American authors, modernism has been of slight consequence. The social context and the author's conceptions of his responsibilities have usually extended beyond that of narrow literary circles. Basically black American literature has been ethnic and/or political in orientation: the decade of the 1920's was characterized by an orientation of ethnic realism, the Harlem Rennissance; next there was the period of the late 30's and the decade of the 40's which was characterized by a mood of nationalistic protest, modeled on Richard Wright's Native Son; the decades of the 1950's was under the influence of the existentialist individualism of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man; this was followed by the orientation of, moral suasion as expressed in the essays and fiction of James Baldwin and the civil rights activities of Martin Luther King; lastly, the mood is one of militant nationalism--initiated by Malcom X and best exemplified in the writings of Leroi Jones. The following section will offer a brief sketch of each of these orientations by relating them to the outline of background ideologies in the first section. Analysis of these shifts in orientation presents the basic outline of our dissertation.

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's

Following the emergence of Marcus Garvey and the new mood of ethnic pride in the 1920's, we observe the development of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement among black writers. The school's major exemplars, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes had all attended colleges. Both Johnson and Cullen were graduates,

with the former having attained a law degree and the latter a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of New York University. They were all products of middle class backgrounds--which in the several decades after 1900 meant that their parents had middle class occupations such as school teaching in black American communities. Though well educated by the standards of the day, all had erratic occupational histories. Having assimilated the values of white American culture, they were all frustrated in their adult lives by the barriers of racial discrimination. Yet none was a radical, except McKay--who belonged to the communist party. Given the basically incompatible forces which made for the development of the literary orientation of the Harlem Renaissance school, it is not surprising to discover the movement's ambivalence of meaning reflected in lives and writings of these authors.

On the one hand it stressed the intrinsic quality of black American ethnic culture, while on the other it symbolized the high levels of educational achievement attained by a few blacks. This latter fact was thought to be a testimony of the talent of black American individuals. One finds it most directly stated in Alain Locke's essay, "The New Negro."

> Sentimental interest in the Negro has ebbed. We used to lament this as the falling off of our friends, now we rejoice and pray to be delivered from self-pity and condescension. . . . There is a growing realization that in social effort the co-operative basis must supplement long distance philanthropy, and that the only safeguard for mass relations in the future must be provided in the carefully maintained contacts of the enlightened minorities of both race groups.

The ambivalence was not logical rather it was a lived contradiction in the lives of these writers. In response to the increased social con-

sciousness of the black masses, the black writer's conception of his relationship to the larger black group changed. However, this was facilitated paradoxically. The development of the movement itself only became possible as a consequence of increased social ties between black writers and white patrons. The latter's interest in the life of the black masses was not the product of Garveyism, but rather an exotic primitivist vogue which had come to fore following white intellectual disillusionment with the war. Hence, white artists-patrons sought out the life of Harlem and friendship with black artists. The most significant white figure for the Harlem Renaissance was Carl Van Vechten, a leading member of the New York literati. Thus the ethnic realism of the Harlem Renaissance was in fact the interception of two contradictory trends which facilitated its emergence.

One hypothesis we shall be interested in examining is whether black American literary and cultural endeavors during this decade were the pursuits of those whose socialization was inter-racial and who were otherwise prevented from attaining a middle class occupation and life style. When we turn to the next period of the late 30's and 40's, black American writers tend to be less well educated. The fact that stands out about most American writers is that they tend not to be university graduates. Is it because middle class professions in the wider society were closed to blacks--educated or not-that these men turned to literary occupations as a means of realizing their integrationist value orientations? These and other questions we will address ourselves to in our analysis of the period of the 1920's.

III

As we turn to the next significant period in the development of black American literature, the naturalistic protest phase of the late 30's and 40's, we observe quite a different group of writers. Unlike the writer of the decade of the 1920's, these writers were not products of the black middle class strata. Naturalism came into vogue in American literature after the turn of the century, in the works of writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris. Not until the depression in the middle thirties, when much emphasis was placed upon the exploitation of the poor, did natrualism come into prominence in black American literature. In contrast to the Harlem Renaissance which was influenced by the ethnic nationalism of Marcus Garvey, this movement reflects the ideology of Marxism. Richard Wright, the son of poor black family from rural Mississippi, was the exemplar of naturalism in black American literature. During his formative years in Chicago, Wright's early associates were Marxists, though he later denounced allegiance to the party publicly. He retained many of the assumptions of Marxism, its strong emphasis on proletarian themes and class exploitation, but withdrew explicit endorsement from its philosophy. Subsequently his work would evidence a strain between Marxist and ethnic thought. Native Son represented a dominant model in black literature which was to reign until the early 50's.

To what extent was the diffusion of this stylistic outlook the product of participation of young black writers during the period in sociometric circles of Marxism or imitation of Native Son as an ideal form? This is always problematic in the emergence of any artistic movement. Noted

above, it refers to the distinction between role concept and style as the product of background and social relations versus that of imitation or learning of received models (education). It is not enough to know that so and so learned such and such technique from Dostevsky and Conrad--we must also ascertain the source of the works meaning. The latter is far more likely to have reference to contemporaneous frames of meaning.

The next major stage of black American literature is the decade of the 1950's, which is dominated by Ellison's Invisible Man and post-war existentialist ideology. Having come into vogue during the second World War, though clearly much older than this, existentialism was a reaction to the mythical and irrational impositions of the group. Be its origin ethnic, religious, political or moral--existentialism stood in opposition to trans-historical meanings. Moreover, though this is only marginal to Ellison's work, it was an expression of lost faith in the scientific rationality in human affairs. Satre and Camus were its most popular post-war exponents. Though much too complex to enter into here, the prototypical existentialist situation is one of choice--the individual in isolation of the group.

Generally, Ellison's Invisible Man stands as one of the most effective expressions of existentialism in American literature. Richard Wright, then resident in Paris and formerly the leading figure of the naturalistic protest school, also came under the influence of existentialism. This was a time when its socio-metric circle included people such as Satre and Simone de Beauvoir. Wright's novel, The Outsider, is a fitting testament to this fact.

Among the most significant features of this orientation was the black American writer's changed conception of his role vis a vis the larger black community. He ceased to view himself as "spokesman of the group' rather he saw himself as an individual. Following the war there had been a general mood of disillusionment with Marxism. In part this was a reaction to Stalin and the Soviet German pact during the early stages of the second World War. But no less important in the U.S. were the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy who, through the public ridicule of intellectuals and artists, once again made individualism a fashionable intellectual outlook. No systematic cultural history of this period--with explicit attention to its literary phase--exists. However, disillusionment, often expressed as 'enlightenment' was widespread. It is also significant that Ellison's novel was published some two years before the Supreme Court's epic making desegregation decision.

Emphasis upon individuation of experience, heightened subjectivization of perception, was strongly manifest. Issues concerning the author's isolation from the problems of black American community life were particularly accented by more than one critic of existentialist black American authors.

Of importance, we must explore such issues as those related to the social experiences that correspond to the stylistic orientation of this period. Might this orientation be explained by the isolation of these authors from black American community life? In view of the fact that many participants in the phase of black American literature are still living, it will be

possible to probe the conditions in greater depth than will be possible for the two preceding movements.

IV

Next we have the period of "moral suasion" in black American literature, exemplified by the writings of James Baldwin and the civil rights philosophy of Dr. Martin L. King. A great deal of concern is manifested toward affecting the conscience of white America.

The last period we will be concerned with emerges during the 1960's, following the Harlem riot of 1964. Malcolm X was the source of its ideological orientation, which emphasized a militant nationalism. There exists many parallels between this orientation and that expressed by Marcus Garvey. However, the black self-help component became differentiated from the more general movement of militant nationalism. This occured at the time that Malcolm X left the Black Muslim organization. In the writings of Leroi Jones, there emerges a new school of realism which stresses hostility and confrontation in race relations. Unlike characters of the 1940's, here there are no Bigger Thomases. Only warriors. The Dutchman, The Toilet and The Slave are the three works that initiate this new school. It is significant that poetry and the theater assumed province over the novel as vehicles for black literary expression. This may be a consequence of the shifting audience orientation of the black writer during the 60's. First, the writer's role assumed a much more explicit political mandate. Second, because this mandate entailed an effort to increase ethnic consciousness and group solidarity, whites for the first time were but a minor consideration

in the black author's orientation. In conjunction to these developments black literature returns to an ideological framework which is indemic to the problems of black people in the urban slum.

Structurally this recent movement's context was not so much the entire black American community, indeed a definite tension existed between the exponents of militancy and the old integrationist-existentialist school. Leroi Jones and his followers stress a militant response to American racism. As yet it is too early to foresee the fate of this trend, but with the establishment of independent black publishing houses such as has happened in Detroit and Chicago--there is a likelihood that black American literature may for the first time have a life independent of white publishing houses.

V

Overall, we plan to achieve our ends by three techniques of study.

(1) Study of the historical settings within which each of the above listed stylistic orientations emerged. This includes study of the biographies of writers and secondary critical commentary of the period.

(2) Analysis of the works of literature themselves--with special attention toward verification of our hypotheses concering the social factors that operated to effect style. Such aspects of fictional representation as the milieu, character types, racial composition of book characters, treatments of time--especially the character's past, the motives of action that impell the books characters, etc.

(3) Interviews of specialists in the field of black American

literature, especially those who have participated in one or another way in the literary movements listed above. And also, we will interview as many black writers as we can via mailed questionnaires.

Given the nature of the historical data that we must rely upon for our analysis, it is necessary to seek information from as many sources as possible as a check upon distorted impressions and sources of disagreement between respondents. Additionally, our interviews will provide a most valuable source of information concerning publishing, patronage and literary apprenticeships.

As conceived, then, our study proposes to analyze styles of literary orientation in relationship to social structural changes in the wider society and the ideological manifestations corresponding to such changes. Our central concern throughout will be that of discerning changes in the social role of the black American writer and a delineation of those forces which facilitated these changes.

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